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SUBJECT: FRANCE SUPPORTS U.S.-EU OPEN SKIES PLUS AGREEMENT

REF: SECSTATE 29781

¶1. (SBU) Econoff delivered reftel points March 14 to Olivier Berthelot, Technical Counselor for Aviation to Minister of Transportation Dominique Perben. Berthelot reiterated French support for the draft agreement, and said that Perben would be calling allies on the issue (mentioning the Netherlands, Ireland and Germany in particular) in advance of the March 22 Council meeting to co-ordinate positions in order to prevent it foundering on the U.K.'s opposition. France's understanding is that unanimous consent is required for adoption. Perben apparently does not envisage making any public statements of support at this point. An earlier call to Jean-Michel Bour, Director of International and Multilateral Affairs at the French Civil Aviation Authority produced a similar statement of support for the agreement, though Bour implied that if pressure was needed to bring the U.K. around, it would have to be exercised by the U.S. rather than France. The Ambassador addressed a follow-up letter to Perben March 16 urging him to support the agreement both in public and with his European partners, including the U.K.

¶2. (SBU) Acting Deputy Chief of Mission also discussed the issue March 8 with the Air France CEO's Chief of Staff, Guy Tardieu, who underlined Air France's support for the agreement, but expressing skepticism that the GOF would weigh in strongly with the U.K. in favor of the agreement. Tardieu also underlined that Air France had quickly released a press communique on 6 March describing the advantages of the proposed agreement and "publicly supporting the final conclusion of an agreement." That press release formed the basis of a very positive March 15 op-ed in the Wall Street Journal signed by Air France CEO Spinetta and KLM CEO Van Wijk.

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